

The Journal News

October 23, 2003

EPA awards IBM for commuting practices

By Caren Halbfinger

ARMONK — Jim Sinocchi, a communications manager for IBM who lives in West Nyack but works in White Plains, routinely avoids the stress-inducing crawl through traffic on his way to work.

Instead, he makes use of IBM's flexible work plans, which encourage employees to work where and when it best suits them. When meetings call Sinocchi to the office, he leaves home after 9 a.m., avoiding the worst of the rush hour jam across the Tappan Zee Bridge. At other times, he travels no farther than his den.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency yesterday kicked off a campaign to encourage such flexible commuting patterns throughout New York City's northern suburbs, part of a national effort to stop more workers from traveling alone in their cars. The agency in May plans to recognize companies by designating them a "Best Workplace for Commuters."

"If you recognize the employers who are doing the right thing to encourage employees to leave their cars at home, we hope others will follow that great example," Jane Kenny, the EPA's regional administrator, told a group of 50 executives who gathered at the IBM Learning Center yesterday.

The EPA began the area campaign by naming IBM one of the nation's best workplaces for commuters, recognizing the company for offering a variety of commuting benefits and options that reduce traffic congestion and pollution.

The information technology giant was cited for offering such benefits as transit passes, tax-free payments for mass transit, van and carpool subsidies, ride-matching, telecommuting and compressed work schedules. IBM routinely allows employees to start two hours later or leave two hours earlier than the usual work day. One-third of the company's global work force, or about 100,000 people, work off-site; 80,000 from home; and 20,000 at clients' offices.

The "Best Workplace" initiative is being supported by transportation officials from Westchester, Rockland and Putnam counties, the state Department of Transportation

FYI

Be the best

For information on how to become a "Best Workplace for Commuters" in Westchester, Rockland, Putnam or Connecticut, contact MetroPool at 800-346-3743 or visit www.metropool.com or www.bwc.gov.

To qualify, companies must offer some of these benefits:

- Compressed work schedules
- Telecommuting
- Lunchtime shuttle
- Incentives to encourage use of alternative transportation, such as additional vacation time
- On-site amenities, such as a convenience mart or dry cleaning, etc.
- A monthly transit/vanpool pass subsidy of at least \$30 or the full cost if the pass is less than \$30
- Ride-sharing or carpool matching, either in-house or through a local or regional agency
- Pre-tax transit or vanpool benefits
- Shuttles from transit stations
- Preferred parking and reduced parking costs for carpools and vanpools
- Employer-provided membership in a car-sharing program
- Secure bicycle parking, showers and lockers

and private agencies, such as MetroPool, that develop programs to help reduce the number of single-occupant cars on the roads.

"I can work at home any time I want," said Sinocchi, 48, who started his career in sales, but switched roles after he injured his spinal cord in a surfing accident when he was 25. "I take one day a week at home to do my writing without interruptions. I find when I work at home, I work longer. My wife has to pull me out of my den."

Commuters already involved in the program in Houston, Washington, D.C., and Tucson, Ariz., drive 3 million to 6 million miles fewer a day, use 35 million to 70 million fewer gallons of gas a day, and their vehicles emit up to 33,000 fewer tons of pollutants annually, Kenny said.

Denise Mildt, human resources director for IBM's research division, said the company's commuter-friendly efforts have been rewarded with better customer satisfaction, greater productivity and an improved bottom line.

IBM's workplace flexibility has been a perk for Lyndonna Libert, an environmental engineer who works from the T.J. Watson Research Center in Yorktown. Libert, 32, had worked for IBM for five years, but had no reason to telecommute until last March, when she bought an older home in the Fleetwood section of Mount Vernon. The plaster was crumbling from some walls, and the house needed a paint job.

"I telecommute when I have contractors working," she said. "It allows me to supervise them while I'm working. It's a great thing."

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